

March 18 1971

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Downs School may be last to go all-in

MORE than 150 members of Parent-Teacher Associations from the 11 primary schools in the Downs School catchment area responded to an invitation from Mr. P. A. Bowden, headmaster of the Downs School, to hear at first hand the proposals for secondary school re-organisation in this area. The plans were accepted by the Berkshire County Council in February (as reported in the *NWN* 25.2.71).

Principal speaker was Mr. T. D. Whitfield, county Director of Education.

Mr. Whitfield said there was no doubt that comprehensive education was coming, and would be the general rule in State-provided schools.

He described the different types of comprehensive systems which could be adopted. The one most suitable and which it was now proposed to introduce in the **Compton-Newbury** area was one in which secondary schools catered for an age range of 11-16, with a **Sixth Form** college to which pupils from all these schools can go.

The advantage of this type

Bartholomew's Grammar School, which would also have a Sixth Form.

At question time he elaborated on this, saying that although the present constitution of St. Bartholomew's presented certain legal problems, the plan was to enlarge it by combining it with the County Girls' School, and operate the two as one educational comprehensive school.

Mr. Whitfield made it clear that his committee did not intend to be rushed into the change-over. "We want to be certain that any change will be at least as good and preferably much better than the existing system," he said, adding that nothing would be done until there were sufficient children to make a comprehensive system workable.

"The earliest date at which sufficient children in this area will reach the age of 11 is 1975, that is, the 150-a-year needed for a five-form entry. A review of the area's child population would take place in 1973, and provided that the requisite number of children were there, notices would be published stating the county's intention to proceed with the conversion to a comprehensive system. This would allow time for any objections to be lodged."

A questioner from Compton

1975 was the probable date, although Hungerford could possibly be a year earlier, and Compton might be a year later. Much depended on the number of children in that age-group.

The display of literature and equipment showing the wide range of subjects and extra-curricular activities followed at the Downs School included information about the CSE examinations which are taken by pupils there at present.

"Can we be sure that employers appreciate this certificate?" asked Mr. Barnes of Leckhampstead.

"It will be an essential requirement of comprehensive schools that GCE courses are provided, assuming that that examination is still in existence," said Mr. Whitfield.

Mr. Bowden said that he had never experienced any difficulty with employers about the CSE.

A question from Mr. Young of Hermitage brought to Mr. Whitfield's notice the fact that there was **no library (other than that at the school) in Compton.**

Mr. Bowden said a recommendation had been made for a **branch library in Compton,** and Mr. Whitfield immediately said that he would take this up with the county librarian.